

THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WILLIAM MATHEWSON MILLIKEN IS DEAD AT 88
WAS DIRECTOR OF CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART FOR 28 YEARS

William Mathewson Milliken, Director Emeritus of The Cleveland Museum of Art, died last night at Lakeside Hospital in Cleveland after a short illness. Milliken, 88, had been in poor health since suffering a heart attack in December.

Director of The Cleveland Museum of Art for 28 years (1930-1958) and Curator of Decorative Arts for 39 (1919-1958), he was the second director of the Museum. He was also Curator of Paintings from 1925 to 1930.

Milliken had joined the Museum in 1919 with the expectation that he would concentrate on modern art. However, the Medieval collection and the May Show, the Museum's annual exhibition of work by artists and craftsmen of Northeastern Ohio, were his greatest achievements. He organized the first May Show in 1919 and was an active promoter of the exhibition throughout his life.

In his early years with the Museum he laid the foundation of the medieval collection through important acquisitions. Beginning with his first major purchase for the Museum in 1923 of the Spitzer Cross, and continuing with the Bethune Casket and the Gothic Table Fountain in 1924, the Stroganoff Ivory in 1925, the Chalandon Enamel in 1926, and most importantly the Guelph Treasure in 1930, Milliken boldly stated that The Cleveland Museum of Art was to collect all art, not just paintings, and that that art was to be of the highest quality, and not necessarily what was popular, fashionable, or of regional interest alone.

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Born in Stamford Connecticut of Scotch-American parents in 1889, Milliken graduated from Princeton in 1911. He joined the staff of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1913 as Assistant Curator in the Department of Decorative Arts where he began his formal relationship with the medieval arts by studying and cataloging the Morgan collections. After service as a Lieutenant in the Army Air Corp during World War I he joined The Cleveland Museum of Art.

One of the great museum directors of this century, Milliken was also one of the first to realize that museums should be educational institutions as well as repositories of fine objects.

Milliken, a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, London, and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, was a member of many other arts organizations. The Hungarian, Italian, Swedish, French, and Spanish governments are among those who decorated him, and he had received numerous honorary degrees. A past president of both the Association of Art Museum Directors and the American Association of Museums, he served as first vice president of the International Council of Museums and as first vice president of the Academie Internationale de la Ceramique.

In 1933 Milliken was appointed a regional director of the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, beginning an association with numerous governmental programs of the New Deal which aimed to give work-relief to destitute artists, make works of art a more integral part of American cultural life, and encourage regional diversity in the creation and appreciation of art. During the decade following his initial appointment Milliken went on to serve as a powerful advisor to the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP), as Ohio chief for national WPA sponsored Art Weeks, as commissioning agent and local representative for the Treasure Relief Art Project (TRAP), and as chairman of many regional juries supervising competitions for post office murals across Ohio.

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In Cleveland he served as a trustee of Karamu House and the Cleveland Art Association and as an advisor of the Cleveland Institute of Art and the Cleveland Institute of Music. He was instrumental in the development of the Fine Arts Garden adjacent to The Cleveland Museum of Art.

During his career with The Cleveland Museum of Art, Milliken was responsible for hundreds of acquisitions that strengthened the Museum's collection in many areas, most notably decorative arts, painting, textiles, African art, and pre-Columbian art. He has been a frequent contributor to art periodicals, especially in the fields of medieval and renaissance art. His published articles number in the hundreds, and he was the author of numerous catalogs and books, most recently an autobiography published in 1977, Born Under The Sign of Libra. His years at the Museum saw the establishment of the Junior Council, the Print Club, the Textile Arts Club, the Department of Music, and the Musart Society. In addition he was active in the planning and construction of the 1958 addition to the Museum.

Retirement was not a time of inactivity for Milliken. He continued his longstanding practice of annual trips to Europe, in recent years for six months or more, and winter visits to Sun Valley. Even in his 80's he was an avid skier.

Numerous projects also kept him busy. In 1959 he went to Australia to help plan the new National Gallery building in Melbourne, and in 1960 completed a 20 lecture tour of Canada. The "Masterpieces of Art" exhibition at the Seattle World's Fair (1961-1962) was the work of his hand and eye, and in 1963 he served as Regent Professor at the University of California at Berkeley.

Milliken, who was a bachelor, is survived by a sister-in-law, Mrs. H.O. Milliken of New York City, and two nephews.

For additional information or photographs, please contact the Public Relations Department, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340.